File Diocese

DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA

Reconciliation Program

POLICE PRACTICES – RACISM IN ACTION?

READ, BUT REPLACE ON BOARD, PLEASE

Report of Task Group C
to the
Diocesan Council, Diocese of Pennsylvania
on the
Relationship of Racism and Police Practices

February, 1972

Accepted by Diocesan Council
February 17, 1972

PREFACE

Task Group "C" of the Task Force for Reconciliation was charged with the study of racial subordination as it relates to police practices in the City of Philadelphia. We met as a group weekly for seven months beginning at the end of October, 1970. In addition, several sub-groups met between our weekly meetings.

Our report is complete, yet also very inadequate. It reflects seven months of total commitment and many hours of toil. Yet, it reflects, too, that we have only scratched the surface of a problem that is wide and deep. We offer what we have in hopes that it will be but a beginning.

Given a Task Group of our size and diversity, seven months is insufficient time to research first-hand and to define and analyze problem areas alleged to exist between police and the black community. Yet, we believe our findings and recommendations to be largely correct and realistic. The discussion of police practices within the black community is not especially new. There is very little in our report which has not been phrased elsewhere. What is unfortunate is the fact that the findings of previous black-white studies have not been honestly acknowledged by the mass of white society and the recommendations not sincerely implemented. It is ironic that the Kerner Report, with its impressive documentation and thoughtful recommendations, should remain unaccepted while smaller local Task Groups reinvestigate much of the same ground and arrive at essentially the same conclusions.

It is also mandatory to understand that most of the problems existing between the black community and the police are a manifestation of or are increased by white racism. As the Kerner Report has pointed out, *In many ways the policeman only symbolizes much deeper problems. The policeman in the ghetto is a symbol not only of law, but of the entire system of law enforcement and criminal justice...the policeman in the ghetto is a symbol of a society from which many ghetto Negroes are increasingly alienated.*

White racism exists throughout our society. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines racism as *1) a belief that human races have distinctive characteristics that determine their respective cultures, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others; 2) a policy of enforcing such asserted right: 3) a system of government and society based upon it.* We interpret white racism to be any attitude, structure or practice which leads consciously or unconsciously to the oppression or suppression of black people; or, more succinctly, white racism is white people putting down black people. The source of this racism lies in the values of each white human being and its ultimate cure consists in changing these values. However, as white racists, we permit our institutions to perpetuate this racism.

One of our Task Group's greatest problems both individually and collectively was dealing with our own racism. We found that our racism frequently interfered with our study process. Therefore, as we believe our Task Force is a microcosm of our Church, then we must include the Church in the list of racist institutions.

We have examined the practices of one institution, the police, because according to the Kerner Commission, unfair and oppressive police practices were the number one complaint of the black community. We feel that such practices do exist. As oppression of a racial group is racism, and since racism is the creation of a white society, unfair and oppressive police practices become white society's number one problem in the area of reconciliation.

It seems obvious that some sort of police institution must exist to protect life and human rights. The need for police exists simply because people are frequently self-centered, aggressive, competitive, and careless. As the police must be responsive to the community, so the community must support and direct the police into proper types of activity.

Policeman are human beings with a very difficult task. As such, we owe them all the help and Christian love we would give to other human beings. Despite the fact that we will

propose many changes in police activities, we are equally well aware that many and probably the majority of police activities are performed in an exemplary manner and for this we are thankful.

Some police practices are oppressive to both blacks and whites. However, blacks are more frequently affected by these practices than white because of the influence of white racism. For example, the predominant manifestation of this oppression is that black citizens are not afforded the presumption of innocence by the police that is given white citizens. These practices have been occuring for a long time in the black community. The insensitivity of white people to this long period of oppression of blacks is an obvious sign of white racism.

The police institution is currently accountable and responsive to the white power structure instead of the community that is policed. The currect public relations program is superficial and tends only to produce a facade of harmony between the police and the community instead of really dealing with the problems that exist between the two. The police insulate themselves from the community. White society in turn uses the police to insulate itself from the black community. The result is that the black community receives less police protection than the white community.

Being accountable and responsive to the white power structure, the police tend to reflect the values of white society. The value of property is the *sine qua non* of the Protestant work ethic and this value is basic to the daily activity of the police. Injury to human beings is considered justifiable in the protection of property. A callous and impersonal attitude of one human being to another, which is common in white society, is greatly magnified in police practices. The police desire impartiality but instead develop impersonality. Impartiality does not demand an impersonal approach, yet many people when once embroiled in the police-legal system find it very difficult, if not impossible, to become disentangled even if they are innocent. This is partly because individuals and the community as a whole do not have a working knowledge of how the police system

functions, but more importantly because of the impersonal, machine-like nature of the police-legal system.

The impersonal nature of the system is perpetuated by many small and subtle actions. A policeman cannot live in the district in which he works, so at the start he is an outsider. Patrol cars instead of foot patrols construct a barrier to the good personal communications which could do much to establish rapport between the community and the police. The frequent shifting of patrolmen to different areas constructs a similar barrier. Dogs, though useful in isolated patrols such as the subways, produce a great barrier to personal communication in situations of potential civil disorder. In addition, the mere presence of canine units in black neighborhoods engenders fear in some residents. Indiscriminate use of such fear inducing tactics is an objectionable manifestation of white racism. Yet, property and an impersonal attitude are highly valued by both white society and the police.

The police institution can be criticised for some of its own institutional practices and values in addition to those which it reflects from white society. Such practices include 1) the accumulation of promotion points on the basis of number of arrests made without consideration for the performance of the individual in the area of human relations; 2) Inappropriate and inadequate selection of candidates for the department; and 3) inadequate training.

The present methods for selecting new candidates for the police department are inappropriate and inadequate. The current process of screening applicants seems to result in the exclusion of many valuable minority group applicants because of relatively minor youthful infractions of the law. The environmental potentiality of such infractions is very high within some inner city neighborhoods and therefore the significance of such infractions is greatly reduced. Rather than be so concerned about minor infractions, careful consideration should be given to accept individuals having potential ability to work with and get along with people. Individuals having racial or ethnic bias should be rejected as all of a man's beliefs, biases and prejudices become expressed

in his work. At present, the community has no part in these screening or hiring practices. We feel that this is unhealthy.

The current inadequate training practices affect both the new recruit and the seasoned officer. 1) the initial training at the police academy is insufficient; there is not enough time or emphasis placed on human relations and community problems. 2) There is also little motivation for seasoned officers to continue their education especially in the area of human relations. 3) A police officer is granted freedom of action which, by virtue of insufficient training in human relations, frequently exceeds his ability reasonably to exercise that freedom. While the exercise of freedom is a problem in other occupations, few occupations grant power to produce such potentially disastrous results. On the basis of this study, we recommend:

A. To the Diocese of Pennsylvania:

1) That parish and/or deanery study groups be formed to study in depth white racism and its contradiction to Christian faith. We suggest, to the extent that it is possible, these groups be ecumenical. We expect the clergy in the diocese to lead their congregations in these basic concerns.
2) That Diocesan Council take the lead in organizing an ecumenical committee consisting of persons from throughout Philadelphia to see that valid recommendations directed specifically to police-community relations be duly considered by the police.
3) That the diocese investigate how it may aid existing groups active in the area of police-community relations. This could perhaps be in conjunction with the existing urban ministry groups. The diocese should also encourage formation of such community groups where none already exist.
4) That additional Task Groups be formed to study in depth several areas that are germane, but which we had insufficient time to study – Lower Court System; Penal System; Legal Aid to the Poor; Juvenile Court System; the whole area of the responsibility of the community,

both black and white, to the police.

5) That Diocesan Council deliver to the Mayor, City Council, and the Police Commissioner copies of this report and strongly urge them to consider and institute the recommendations below.

A. To the Mayor, City Council, and Police Commissioner of Philadelphia:

1) That Civilian Advisory Boards be established for each police district, bearing in mind that the previous Review Board, when in existence, did not fully satisfy the need. These boards should include representatives from all segments of the community. It is the duty of the boards to advise the complainants of each step of the board's progress and to make public the result of its investigations.

2) That the Police Department establish and make public a guideline for the evaluation of police performance in coping with all situations without resorting to either physical or verbal violence. The inappropriate use of physical force should be considered failure of effective police action. This should place in proper perspective the value of life and human dignity above property rights.

3) That a representative from the District Attorney's Office be assigned to each station to act as consultant on arresting procedures, thereby helping to reduce the number of unnecessary arrests.

4) That patrol practices be redesigned to increase the patrolman's knowledge of the community. The following should be implemented:

a) the number of foot patrolmen should be increased, while patrol car activity should be decreased;

b) whether in patrol cars or on foot, patrolmen should be kept in areas long enough so that they know the people and conditions. The people should also become acquainted with the patrolmen; and

c) policemen should not only be permitted to live in the areas in which they work but be encouraged to do so.

5) That the use of canine units be carefully controlled with

consideration given to their ability to precipitate problems as well as to control problems.

6) That a special section within the police department be established to serve in urban ghettos. This section should incorporate the following practices:

a) policemen with a reputation for either physical or verbal abuse should be removed from duty in urban ghettos immediately;

b) screening procedures should be developed to insure that policemen with superior ability, sensitivity, and judgment be assigned to ghetto positions;

c) training programs should be implemented specifically to acquaint these policemen with the concept of white racism as well as with cultural and language differences between the white and black communities so that they can be aware of areas of sensitivity in the black community and their ability either to soothe or irritate these areas.

d) promotion points should be awarded for acts relating to the betterment of community relations.

7) That a committee composed of police officials and laymen be established to select candidates for the police academy. This group should be particularly sensitive to the need for men with compassion and understanding as well as the necessity of rejecting physically aggressive and bigoted applicants.

8) That the twelve-week training period be extended to permit a substantial increase in training in the complex interpersonal relationships of modern society.

9) That greater incentive be given to the continuance of formal education especially in the areas of the behavioral sciences and community relations. Strong weight should be given to such education when an individual is considered for promotion.

10) That, in the interest of economy, and as a method of funding the recommendations listed above, consideration should be given to better utilization of manpower within the police department. Many functions presently performed by policemen could

possibly be accomplished more economically and efficiently by civilian employees.

In conclusion, we affirm the primary Christian value of the well-being of, and protection of, human life, which includes the edifying of individual dignity.

The Church must exercise strong leadership in this problem area. Specifically, we must help church people in all walks of life understand their responsibility in building healthy police-community cooperation. The Church, as a servant, must specifically and directly aid existing groups in whatever way it can. The members of this committee are prepared to help individual groups, particularly Parish groups, which wish to study or take action in this area.

Finally, we are all God's children and as such stand under judgment for both our successes and failures. Thus, the Church must encourage its people to be aware of the problem an take an active part in its solution.

APPENDIX 1

TASK GROUP MEMBERS

Chairman: The Rev. Andrew France
The Episcopal Academy, Merion

Mrs. James S. Barnes (Nancy)	Calvary, Germantown
Mrs. Clarence S. Barton (Jane)	St. Alban's, Newtown Square
Mrs. John W. Forrester (Elizabeth)	St. Thomas, Philadelphia
Mr. Albert Halverstadt, Jr.	Trinity, Gulph Mills
The Rev. David W. Hyatt	Holy Apostles and the Mediator, Philadelphia
Mrs. Richard Hampton (Jane)	Trinity, Ambler
Mrs. Charles E. Higbee (Hallie)	St. Dunstan's, Blue Bell
Miss Margaret Hunter	Holy Trinity, Philadelphia
Miss Melanie Miller	St. Andrew's-in-the-Field, Philadelphia
Mr. Charles Moore	Advent, Kennett Square
Mr. John L. Pittenger	Church-Without-Walls
Miss Libby Pope	Good Samaritan, Paoli
Mrs. Marcellus Reddick (J. Flossie)	St. Andrew's and St. Monica's, Philadelphia
Dr. Charles Tate	Messiah, Gwynedd
Mrs. George Taylor, Jr. (Audrey)	St. Jude and the Nativity, Lafayette Hill

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APPENDIX II

METHOD

Our method was: 1) to collect data; 2) to define problem areas; 3) to make recommendations to Council for action programs.

Data was collected in several ways: 1) viewing, discussing the film "Black History: Lost, Stolen or Strayed," 2) openly and honestly discussing our own feelings and stereotypes about blacks, whites, police, youth, the Christian and his community; 3) having in to talk with us the following persons:

Officer Centanni	Police Community Relations Officer, Philadelphia Police
Mr. Jack Levine	Executive Director, Philadelphians for Equal Justice
Mr. Vincent Ziccardi	Public Defender for the City of Philadelphia (a private institution and not an agency of the City)
Mr. Andrew Foster	Executive Director, Afro-American Federation of Germantown
Mr. Daniel Parrish	Teenage Member of the Board of Directors, Afro-American Federation

4) we collected and read many articles from magazines and papers. Several members read specific books dealing with our area of study; two members spent four hours on a Friday night patrolling West Philadelphia in a Red Car with the District Captain and a Sergeant; 6) one member spoke at length with a friend who is a Police Academy student; 8) one member spoke at length with two officers of the Philadelphia Police Community Relations Department; 9) all members shared their several experiences with police both in Philadelphia and other cities, both as citizens directly in relation to the police and as citizens involved with inner city residents and their experience with the police.